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D. S. G. Cabell.

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MY NATIVE LAND.

A POEM.

——Dulces moriens reminiscitur Argos

VIRG.

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TO THE

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THIS POEM

IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED, BY AN

HONORARY MEMBER.

Lynchburg, Virginia,
Dec. 28, 1827.

MY NATIVE LAND.

Land of my fathers' graves, land of my birth,
To me the dearest, loveliest spot on earth,
I greet thee once again. So long estranged
Much in myself, and much in thee is changed.
Here shall my wandering steps awhile delay
Ere business press, and call me hence away;
Awhile thy streamy plains and hills explore,
For they perhaps shall meet my eye no more.—
Dear streams, and lawns, and solitudes profound!
Where first my infant footsteps marked the ground,
When on Life's blooming morn your beauties shone,
And cares, and fears, and sorrows were unknown,
Beam out anew, while mem'ry's touch supplies
Your former charms, in Fancy's thousand dyes,
Sooth the sad thoughts of all my sorrows past
And make me feel, as when we parted last,
Before this sweet illusion disappears,
Changed into common life, with all its cares.—
In childhood's hour, if little be enjoyed,
Pain is unfelt, and pleasure unalloyed,
Or if a casual sorrow wounds the mind
It heals too soon, to leave a scar behind;
The shaft of pain withdrawn, the transient tear
Soon dries, and leaves the soul serene and clear:

But boundless stores of novelty invite
To fresh pursuit, and ever new delight,
And ardent Hope's enchanted veil conceals
The pains and cares, advancing Time reveals.
Hence, when departed Hours, and all they wrought
Of good or ill, revive in pensive thought,
And glitter through the gathering mist of years
No visionary form of grief appears;
Or if appears, of mournful aspect yet
It has a charm we wish not to forget.—
  Cold is his bosom, that reflects unmoved
On all his artless childhood once approved;
Nor pauses retrospective on the scene
Of Life's young morn, unclouded and serene,
Nor heaves a sigh, endeavoring to regain
His native feelings on his native plain,
Nor mourns that Time and change have borne away
The warmth and freshness of his earlier day.
Me, not the lapse of many a weary year
Nor changes in myself, nor changes here,
Defend from feelings and emotions strong
(Indulged not often, but perhaps too long,)
When from long absence, I return to trace
The well-known features of my native place,
And tender Recollection numbers o'er
My schemes, and Hopes, and pleasures now no more.
  A fretful infant, and a wayward boy
In me, my friends found much for grief and joy;
Grief, not for crimes, or stubbornness of soul,
But whims and fancies they could not controul.
A thoughtful, melancholy turn of mind,
To mirth, and light amusements disinclined.

They blamed me much for being dull and shy,
And when I laughed or wept, they scarce knew why:
Hence, when our country parties, spruce and fine,
Convened for frolic, (more intent to dine,)
Some favorite volume, or capricious mood
Detained me in the shades of solitude;
Far from the merry group and mazy dance,
To watch the genial Season's coy advance,
Where whispering zephyrs wafted rich perfume,
And breathed the timid roses into bloom.

Pleased with the lonely walk, when morning mild
Poured through the vales, her wood-notes sweetly wild,
While the blithe songsters smoothed their glossy wings,
Or wheeled in amorous chace their airy rings,
I tuned to Nature's charms my infant lays,
When bounding joy grew vocal in her praise;
Soft were the notes, tho' rapture struck the string,
For heart-felt pleasure is a serious thing.—

Then, where the precipice abrupt and vast,
Wide o'er the subject plains its shadow cast,
I loved to linger and survey the scene
Of forests wild, and cultured fields between;
Reclined at ease to count the distant flocks,
Or gather wild flowers nodding from the rocks;
To hear the headlong torrent rushing by,
Its loudest thunders scarcely heard, so high;
Or the lone dove her tale of sorrow tell,
With many a pause, and soft melodious swell.

Dear, long regretted moments! Time has drawn
Their picture lovely now, but all are gone.
Where yon disjointed fragments strew the field
By clustering brambles now almost concealed

Our dwelling stood—a simple—rural rest
With every social, kind endearment blest.
Here grassy seats, and shady trees around—
They felt the axe, and can no more be found.
Our little garden plat is all forgot,
And scarce a vestige designates the spot.
The willow drooped in many a graceful braid
Where now, the rugged thorn extends his shade;
And where the lily breathed her sweets around
The russet wild-briar trails along the ground—;
Where yon rank waving grass and tangled brake
Shelter the reptiles in a putrid lake,
Was a trim meadow, and as pure a stream
As ever glittered to the morning beam.
Lamented change! These ruins seem to say,
They, *like myself*, have known a better day—
In fancy's ear, their tales of suffering tell
And stand to me, in mournful parallel.
In simple, quiet beauty once they smiled,
I was a sportive, and a happy child;
The hand of rustic labour misapplied
Ravaged their modest charms and humble pride,
And spread in rank luxuriance o'er the plain
The noxious *plant*, Virginia's boast and bane;
Rifled the soil at avarice's stern behest
And all-destroying time has done the rest.
Now desert, desolate and long decayed
Like me they flourished—I like them must fade.
  The rocks and pines that crown my fav'rite hill
Alone retain their former aspect still;
Those hoary cliffs, around whose summits cold
The clouds of summer noon are often rolled;

Whose shattered crags in furrowed lines display
Where angry thunders ploughed their furious way;
When brooding showers essayed their infant force
Ere tempest winged them on their destined course;
Those pines, whose solemn murmurs seldom sleep
Tho' zephyr scarcely breathes along the steep;
This shady grot, irregular and wild,
Whose native beauties, art has never spoiled—
All seem to recognise me, and appear
Lovely as when a child I rambled here.
Beloved retreats! Secluded from the jar
Of busy multitudes, not heard so far.
From boisterous mirth, and folly's laughter loud,
Pomps of the rich, and insults of the proud.
Remote from avarice' and ambition's strife
That actuates and embitters common life.
The axe and flame have never thundered there
Nor sturdy tillage urged the glittering share;
Nor to the merry shouts of reapers nigh
Have these wild echos ever deigned reply.
But prowling foxes bark secure from fear;
Here undisturbed repose the timid deer,
And croaking ravens tend their clamorous brood
Sole tenants of the trackless solitude.
  Yet far more interesting to my heart
These barren wilds, than all the grace of art.
And far more dear these shaggy woods and rocks
Than the tame pride of cultured fields and flocks.
True, the rough hand of industry may tame
The forest, yielding to his axe and flame,
May joy to give the tangled wilderness
A milder aspect and a lovelier dress;

Fill his capacious granaries hence, and pour
On luxury's lap a more exuberant store,
And while he reaps abundance, peace, and health,
Is adding to the mass of general wealth.
But here I seek my woods and wilds again
Haunts of my youth, and would not seek in vain.
Whence these attachments, little understood,
Yet felt and cherished by the wise and good?
Why graved indelibly on memory's page
Remain the trifles of that tender age,
When the young mind in eager chase employed
Deserts its object, ere it be enjoyed?
Ere knowledge beam on error's devious way
Or love or friendship give the passions play?
On scenes of pleasure or of suffering *past*
Why is affection riveted so fast?
We would not live our childish years again
Reason contemns them, trivial, light and vain;
But feeling triumphs over reason's boast,
And polished minds indulge and love it most.
  Nor is it only pleasing to review
What all may feel, and own important too;
For, though the stream of years with ceaseless force
Wears deep the channel, that betrays its course;
Leaves many a landmark in its devious range
Of prominent event or wasting change;—
Its trivial currents oft effect a trace
That time and grief and change cannot efface.—
Where these tall poplars climb along the hill
And tangled hazles drink the latent rill,
And pendent vines, half dead and withered now
With luscious clusters loaded many a bough,—

How many images of past delight,
Unseen by others, crowd upon my sight!
Fair was the morn, but Autumn's yellow veil
Fluttered, inconstant on the sighing gale;
Not loaded yet with clouds and chilling showers
But wafting fragrance from the latest flowers.—
One friend (I called him so) of equal years
As ardent as myself, as void of cares,
Was my companion—On that spreading beach
The grapes hung ripe, but far above our reach.
Oft we essayed to climb, as often failed,
Tugged at the vine and finally prevailed.
While broken twigs and leaves fell thick around,
We drew the juicy treasure to the ground.—
Then, what the slender hazles would afford
We gathered frugal, for our winter hoard,
Stripped off their tawny husks, and fond to boast
Counted the nuts, to see, who had the most.—
Sometimes on yonder cliff, whose awful form
Lifts the tall forest to the mountain storm,
We sought for chesnuts; easy to descry,
The burs were open, but the trees were high.—
With many a club and stone we strove to gain
The lovely prize, nor always strove in vain;—
Shook from their thorny coats, they rattled down
Inestimable, plump, and glossy brown.—
  Beneath this shady rock, I used to lie
When summer noon glowed silent thro' the sky,
Wearied with rambling, with amusement cloyed,
Rest and refreshing, coolness I enjoyed.
And faint from toil, while here at ease reclined
I gave to soothing languor all my mind:

Watched from afar, the scattered clouds advance
And slowly glide along the blue expanse,
Presenting to Imagination's eye
The mountains, vales, and landscapes of the sky,
Where gorgeous palaces their gates unfold
And solemn temples bright with burnished gold;
While from their fleecy sides in splendour curled
Look forth the inmates of another world.
In long succession shifting to the gale
They fade away, and other shapes prevail.—
Lulled by the tinkling sound of distant bells,
Or torrents murm'ring down the winding dells,
Mixed with the hum of bees, whose active wing
Explored the last retiring sweets of Spring,
On every nerve the soft sensation crept
Till every faculty but Fancy slept.—
She, sportive power, with busy fingers wrought
Light dreams from mere vacuity of thought.
Bright as the painted bow in vernal showers
Or drops that glitter on the humid flowers,
And glancing various, in succession fast
Her train of fleeting imagery passed.—
Young Innocence in sunny robes was seen
With rosy health, desporting on the green;
Laughter and Mirth were there, with sparkling eyes
And Infant Hope, pursuing Butterflies.—
Yet now and then an anxious look he threw
To brighter fields just rising into view:—
For, tho' Remembrance had no chilling frown
To blast the bloom of Pleasure's flow'ry crown,
Yet were the sprightly group at times disturbed
By appetites and passions badly curbed;—

And scowling in their rear, where'er they went,
Followed Satiety and Discontent.—
Rapt in sweet vision, then, I seemed to hear
Melodious numbers wafted to my ear,
From that enchanted Harp, whose melting falls
The breezes waft along their airy Halls,
When struck at pausing intervals the sound
Swells on the Hills, and Silence sleeps around.
I waked to iterate the charming dream,
'Twas nothing but the Eagle's distant scream.—
  In softened radiance to the blushing West
The sun descending sought his wonted rest,
And drew in pomp around his flaming bed
His cloudy curtains, tinged with rosy red,
And I forgetful of approaching night
Watched the long lingering beams of parting light,
Where the *twin Peaks* like hoary giants rise*
In frowning grandeur midway to the skies;
While twilight deepened on the plains below
Their towering heights detained the yellow glow,
Till slowly fading from my distant view
Their rocky summits slept in pensive blue.—
  Such were my sports, my pleasures such as these
Too dull to charm, too singular to please
The calculating, or the giddy crowd,
Immersed in gain, or mirth or laughter loud.—
Yet were there some; I found a chosen few
True to my taste, to all my feelings true;
Whose bosoms tuned by Nature's finest touch
Erred like my own, and wooed her charms too much:—

* Peaks of Otter, in Bedford County, Virginia.

For, while her beauties melt the raptured heart
'Tis left more pervious to misfortune's dart;
And that which makes our joys intensely glow
Adds tenfold honor to the night of woe.—
There is a sadly pleasing joy in grief
In aching thought that seeks not for relief;
Oft as remembrance wakes the tender theme
Of joys forever vanished like a dream;—
Calls forth her shadowy train in long review
In beamy robes to Nature more than true.—
Come, then, ye dear companions of my youth!
Each face in smiles, each accent joy and truth,
How gladly would I join your sparkling train
And sport in childhood's flow'ry fields again!
Once more this throbbing bosom might forget,
The pang of fear and torture of regret;
Sooth all its cares, and bid its tumults cease,
In that sweet world of innocence and peace.—
Fallacious dream! all mournful now appears
That fairy land beneath the cloud of years.
Its noisy tenants of my early day,
Dispersed to different regions far away,
Some to the West, some plough the Atlantic wave,—
The larger portion slumber in the grave—
Beneath the shade of yonder straggling trees
Whose aged branches sigh in every breeze,
In long repose (her better part above)
Sleeps the first object of my infant love;
Spread your long arms, ye murmuring pines! and wave
Your deepest umbrage o'er that humble grave.
There let reviewing Spring her fragrance breathe
In honor to the sacred dust beneath,

And while she laughs abroad, profuse of flowers,
And wakes the song amid her leafy bowers,
There let the widowed warbler come and join
His mournful notes in unison with mine.
My mother! Melancholy was the morn
That found me orphaned, and almost forlorn.
My friend! My guide! Oh, could not mercy save
Her for her child, or lay me in her grave!
Why cheer my drooping and unsheltered head,
When to the skies, her gentle spirit fled?
Why bid me live, since riper years must pay
Their long arrears to that lamented day?
I had a mother, tender, kind and true,
Her virtues many and her failings few;
With warm solicitude and watchful eye,
She taught me what to follow, what to fly,
And warned me disappointment and distress
In life must be my portion, more or less;
That fierce disease would often banish health;
Pride point the insolence of power and wealth;
Folly and vice allure; pretended friends
Abuse my confidence for private ends;
And fears and sorrows hovering round my head
Pursue me to my last and narrow bed.
Yet would she say, in Virtue's path was found
A balm to heal the bosom's deepest wound:
Winged my young thoughts to better worlds above,
There to repose my confidence and Love.
Her fond affection never would deceive,
But these were things I could not then believe.
Yet though her warnings vanished from my mind,
Her precepts left a faithful trace behind;—

In memory's careful records still remain,
And long experience proves, they were not vain.
'Tis past! The dreams of Fancy disappear:
I feel myself a Stranger, even here.
Why then expatiate? Why unlock the store
Of mournful memory, only to deplore
(And linger here, unwilling to forget)
Departed joys, the theme of long regret?
For me no more these jutting cliffs shall form
A shade from heat, or shelter from the storm;
No more these breezy summits shall attend
The gentle accents of my long-lost friend;
No more this rill in dewy murmurs weep,
When noon-day musings press the verge of sleep;
Nor sportive Fancy to my ears convey,
Aerial music, breathing far away.
Nor evermore a mother's presence bless,
Share all my joys, or sooth me in distress.—
Adieu! Perhaps forever! Should it be,—
"Land of my Fathers! I will think of thee."
Long as its motions last, and vital heat,
Within my heart, thy lovely name shall beat.—
Tho' rude thy piny hills, a thankless soil
Whence scanty products meet the tiller's toil.
Tho' thy wild scenery, and thy fickle clime,
Exhibit little beauteous, or sublime;—
And timid superstition's witching tales,
And Gothic ignorance linger in thy vales;
The charms that could my infant love engage,
Have fixed the feelings of maturer age.
So strongly linked to joys and sorrows past—
I loved thee first—loved long—will love thee last.

Whether, where Beauty taught me first to feel,
And mutual passion fixed the sacred seal
On treasures, Heaven reserved for me alone,
A friend, a bosom dearer than my own,
On Staunton's banks my wandering feet shall rest,
Or in some Eden of the Rosy West,
In Alabama's ever verdant clime,
Or where the wild Missouri rolls sublime;
Or 'mid the Bedford hills, whose limpid streams,
Pay scanty tribute to the mighty James.—
Land of my birth! and where my fathers sleep,
Oft shall Remembrance turn to thee and weep;
And though my steps be doomed to wander far,
Affection tremble to her Polar Star,
Till the last throb shall lay this bosom low,
Where *Memory* and *Affection* cease to *glow.*

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